

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3542

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 5052

FOR DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY EAGLEBURGER FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AFSP TS

SUBJECT: ENROLLMENT AT FSI ARABIC SCHOOL

REF: STATE 175498

1. I WOULD LIKE TO CALL TO YOUR PERSONAL ATTENTION REFERENCED DEPARTMENT TELEGRAM WHICH INFORMS EMBASSY THAT "APPROPRIATE LEVEL IN DEPARTMENT" HAS AUTHORIZED ACCEPTANCE OF AUSTRALIAN FSO IN FSI TUNIS ARABIC LANGUAGE PROGRAM AND ASKS THAT EMBASSY CONTACT GOT "TO ENSURE THAT THERE IS NO OBJECTION FROM THAT QUARTER".

2. WHILE I DO NOT KNOW THAT YOU ARE THE "APPROPRIATE LEVEL" REFERRED TO, I SUSPECT THAT THIS MAY BE THE CASE AND HAVE THEREFORE DECIDED TO USE THIS CHANNEL. WE NOW HAVE A GOOD THING GOING HERE IN THE FSI ARABIC SCHOOL (NEW DIRECTOR IS DOING AN EXCELLENT JOB), AND I WOULD LIKE TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO GET MAXIMUM BENEFIT FOR USG OUT OF THE SCHOOL. I THINK I CAN DO A BETTER JOB OF THIS IF ACTION OFFICES IN THE DEPARTMENT WILL CONSULT ME BEFORE DISCUSSIONS WITH OTHER AGENCIES OR OTHER GOVERNMENTS (AND AFTER FSI HAS CONSULTED WITH NEA AND PER, WHICH HAVE THE PRIMARY INTEREST IN DEVELOPING TRAINED ARABISTS).

3. TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT IS PLEASED TO HAVE THE ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHOOL HERE AND WE ARE BEING PROVIDED WITH A
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STABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR TRAINING ARABISTS ON NO MORE THAN

AN ORAL UNDERSTANDING. I SUSPECT, HOWEVER, THAT ONE OF THE REASONS THAT THE GOT HAS PREFERRED TO KEEP THIS UNDERSTANDING VERY INFORMAL RELATES TO THEIR SENSITIVITY TO RADICAL ARAB CHARGES OF BEING "TOO CLOSE TO THE AMERICANS". IT IS FOR THIS REASON THAT WE HAVE URGED IN THE PAST THAT ANY CHANGE IN THE CHARACTER OF THE SCHOOL BE APPROACHED CAREFULLY. WE WERE OBLIGED TO OBTAIN THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S APPROVAL TO INCLUDING US MILITARY IN THE SCHOOL AFTER AGREEMENT HAD ALREADY BEEN REACHED BETWEEN STATE AND DOD WITHOUT ANY REFERENCE TO THE EMBASSY. AT THAT TIME WE CAUTIONED DEPARTMENT ON NEED FOR HANDLING OUR RELATIONS WITH GOT CAREFULLY IN THE FUTURE (TUNIS 3431). I AM AFRAID GOT IS LIKELY TO RAISE QUESTIONS REGARDING GRADUAL CHANGE WE ARE MAKING IN NATURE AND COMPOSITION OF THE SCHOOL ONCE IT ALLOWED US TO GET OUR FOOT IN THE DOOR.

4. IN REGARD TO SPECIFIC REQUEST THAT WE CONTACT GOT ON ENROLLING AUSTRALIAN IT IS NOT A SIMPLE MATTER OF ENSURING "THAT THERE IS NO OBJECTION FROM THAT QUARTER". BEFORE DECIDING WHETHER IT WOULD BE PRUDENT TO REQUEST GOT APPROVAL FOR ENROLLMENT OF AUSTRALIAN, I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT ELSE MIGHT BE INVOLVED. FOR EXAMPLE, REFTEL CITES ENROLLMENT OF AUSTRALIAN, CANADIAN AND NEW ZEALAND STUDENTS AT FSI JAPANESE SCHOOL AND STATES THAT THIS HAS PROVED MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL. I AM ALSO AWARE THAT TWO STUDENTS FROM BRITISH ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHOOL IN LEBANON ARE NOW STUDYING AT THE BOURGUIBA INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGES IN TUNIS AND ARE REPORTEDLY NOT HAPPY WITH THEIR INSTRUCTION. I WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF UK EMBASSY APPROACHED DEPARTMENT ON ENROLLING THEM IN OUR SCHOOL. (CANADIANS APPROACHED DEPARTMENT SOME MONTHS AGO AND WERE REBUFFED.)

5. ACCORDINGLY, I WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING FULLER STATEMENT OF DEPARTMENT POLICY ON ENROLLING FOREIGN STUDENTS AT FSI ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHOOL IN TUNIS BEFORE MAKING ANY APPROACH TO TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT. WHILE I HAVE NO OBJECTION IN PRINCIPLE TO OUR HELPING OUR FRIENDS WITH THEIR LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAMS, OUR FIRST CONCERN

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SHOULD BE TO PROTECT OUR OWN INTERESTS. AS I SAID IN THE BEGINNING OF THIS MESSAGE, WE HAVE A GOOD THING GOING HERE NOW. BUT I QUESTION WHETHER THE DEPARTMENT CAN REALISTICALLY EXPECT TO MAINTAIN A LANGUAGE SCHOOL IN ANY ARAB COUNTRY OVER THE LONG RUN IF ONLY A SMALL MINORITY OF THE STUDENTS ARE FROM THE STATE DEPARTMENT. I WOULD ALSO AGREE WITH OPINION EXPRESSED BY MANY OF OUR AMBASSADORS TO ARAB COUNTRIES OVER THE PAST YEAR

THAT AN ARABIC LANGUAGE FIELD SCHOOL IS AN INCREASINGLY
IMPORTANT ASSET.
MULCAHY

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